

“IN THE WAY OF BUSINESS”

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AS the large, thick-set man with the red face, the bushy mustache, and the very square chin swung round on his swivel chair, at the great roll-top desk with its elaborate arrangements of telephones, receivers, and electric buttons, he conveyed to the little mild-eyed man waiting on a chair by the door the sense of infinite power.

And surely it must be a position requiring singular gifts and remarkable capacity. For was this not Dollbones, the house famous throughout the civilized world for supplying trimmings, gimp, embroidery, buttons, and other accessories to nearly every retail furnisher in England

and the colonies? and was not this Mr. Godfrey Hylam, the London manager? To hold such a position a man must have not only brains, and an infinite capacity for work and driving power, but he must have character, a genius for judging people and making quick decisions.

"Almost like a general," thought the mild-eyed man by the door. He had waited fifty minutes in the outer office for his interview, and on being at length shown in, had been told to "sit down a minute." This minute had been protracted into thirty-five minutes, but it was very interesting to watch the great man grappling with the myriad affairs that came whispering through the wires, and giving sharp instructions to the two flurried clerks who sat in the same office, or dictating to the young lady stenographer who sat furtively on a small chair by his side scribbling into a book with a fountain-pen.

“She looks ill and worried,” thought the little man. He was indulging in a dreamy speculation on the girl’s home life, when he was suddenly pulled up by the percussion of Mr. Hylam’s voice. He realized that the great man was speaking to him. He was saying:

“Let ’s see, what ’s your name?”

“Thomas Pinwell, sir,” he answered, and stood up.

“*What* name?” repeated the big man.

“Pinwell—Thomas Pinwell,” he said in a rather louder voice.

Mr. Hylam looked irritably among some papers and sighed. He then continued dictating a letter to the stenographer. When that was finished he got up, and went out of the room. He was absent about ten minutes, and then came hurrying in with some more papers. He called out as he walked:

“Jackson, have you got that statement from Jorrocks, Musgrove & Bellwither?”

One of the clerks jumped up and said:

"I'll find it, sir."

The clerk took some time to do this, and in the meanwhile Mr. Hylam dictated another report to the young lady. Then the clerk brought the statement, and he and Mr. Hylam discussed it at some length. He gave the clerk some further instructions, which were twice interrupted by the telephone bell. When this was finished, Mr. Hylam again caught sight of the little man by the door. He looked at him with surprise, and said:

"Let's see, what's your name?"

"Pinwell—Thomas Pinwell, sir," he answered patiently.

Mr. Hylam again sighed and fingered a lot of papers in pigeon-holes. At that moment there was a knock, and a boy in buttons entered and said:

"There's Mr. Curtis, of Curtis, Tonks & Curtis, called."

“Oh!” exclaimed Mr. Hylam. “Yes. All right. Er—ask him to come in. I want to see him.” He turned to the telephone, and asked some one to put him on to some one else, and while waiting with the receiver to his ear, his eye once more caught sight of the little man by the door. He called out to him:

“Oh!—er—just wait outside a minute, Mr.—er— Hullo! is that you, Thomson?”

Finding himself temporarily dismissed, Mr. Pinwell took up his hat and went into the outer office. There was a tall, elderly man with a fur-lined overcoat standing there, and he was immediately shown in. He remained with Mr. Hylam just one hour. At the end of that time, one of the directors called and went out to lunch with Mr. Hylam. A clerk gave Mr. Pinwell the tip that he had better call back about four o'clock. He said he would do so. He had

had thirty years' experience in the furnishing trade, and he knew that "business was business." One had to be patient, to conform to its prescripts. A gentleman like Mr. Hylam lived under continual pressure. He was acting according to his conscience in the best interests of the firm. One had to take one's chance with him. After all, it would be very nice to get the job. He had been out so long, and he was not so young as he used to be. He thought of his placid wife and the two children. They were indeed getting into a very penurious state. He understood that the salary would be thirty shillings per week; and a small royalty on the sales. Not a princely emolument but it would make all the difference. Besides, what might not the royalties amount to? If he worked hard and energetically he might make between two and three pounds per week—who knows? He went into an aërated bread shop and

had a cup of tea and a piece of seed cake, and read the morning paper. He stayed there as long as he dare, and then went for a stroll round the streets. At four o'clock precisely he presented himself at the managerial office at Dollbones once more. Mr. Hylam had not returned. They expected him every minute. There were five other people waiting to see him. At half-past four Mr. Hylam came in, smoking a cigar. He was accompanied by another gentleman. They walked right through the waiting crowd and went into the inner office and shut the door. As a matter of fact, Mr. Pinwell did not see the manager at all that day. So great was the congestion of business in the trimming, gimp, embroidery, and button business that afternoon that he was advised by one of the least aggressive clerks, at about a quarter to six, to try his luck in the morning. It was a quarter-past three on the following afternoon that

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he eventually obtained his interview with Mr. Hylam, and it was from his point of view entirely satisfactory. Mr. Hylam said:

"Let's see. You told me your name?"

"Yes, sir," he answered. "Thomas Pinwell."

Mr. Hylam seemed at last to find the papers he desired. He said:

"Er—just come here. Show me your references."

Mr. Pinwell approached the great desk deferentially. On it was a chart of London with one section shaded red. Mr. Hylam read the references carefully and then asked one or two searching questions. At last he said:

"Well, now, look here. This is your section. Go to Mr. Green, and he will give you the cards and samples. Then go to Rodney in the Outer London department upstairs, and he will give you a list of sev-

eral hundred furnishing houses with the names of the buyers and a few particulars. Everything else you must find out. The salary is thirty shillings a week and two per cent. on sales completed. Settlement monthly. Good-day, Mr.—er—”

He turned to the telephone, and Mr. Pinwell's heart beat rapidly. He had really got a job again! As he walked to the door he had a vision of the expression of delight on his wife's face as he told her the news. He visualized a certain day in a certain month when he would bring home a lot of sovereigns and buy the children things. Two per cent.! For every hundred pounds' worth of orders, two golden sovereigns of his very own! It seemed too good to be true!

His wife indeed did share with him the comforting joys of this new vista of commercial prosperity. They occupied now two rooms in Camling Town, and Tom had

been out so long there was no immediate prospect of a removal. But the rent was now secure and just the barest necessities of life, and everything depended on the two per cent. commission. He was to start on the following Monday, and the intervening days were filled with active preparations. There were shirts to mend, an overcoat to be stitched, a pair of boots to have the heels set up, and three new collars to be bought. These were vital things pertinent to the active propaganda of the bread-winner. Other things were urgent, —a new piece of oil-cloth for the bedroom, some underclothes for the girls, and several small debts—but all these things *could* wait, at any rate a month or two, till the commissions started coming in. For Mrs. Pinwell herself there never seemed necessities. She always managed to look somehow respectable, and, as Mr. Pinwell once remarked to a neighbor, "My wife is a mar-

vel, sir, with a string bag. She always believes in bringing the things home herself. She goes out into the High Street, Camling Town, on a Saturday night, and I assure you, sir, it 's surprising what she will bring back. She will make a shilling go further than many of them would half-a-crown. She is a remarkable woman. It surprises me how she manages to bargain, being so unassuming, so diffident, as it were, in the home.”

There was nothing, then, missing in the necessary equipment of Mr. Pinwell as he set out with his leather case of samples on the following Monday. It was a cold, bright day, and he enjoyed the exercise of walking. He was not by nature a pushful man and he found the business of calling on people whom he did not know somewhat irksome. Fortunately he was by temperament patient and understanding, and he made allowances when people were rude to

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him, or kept him waiting indefinitely and then gave him no orders. "It 's all in the way of business," he thought as he shuffled out of the shop and sought the next street.

At the end of the first week he explained to his wife:

"You see, my dear, there 's a lot of spade-work to be done yet. I 'm afraid Flinders, who had the round before me, must have neglected it disgracefully. It all requires working up again. One has to get to *know* people, the right people, of course. They seem prejudiced against one like, at first."

"Was that Mr. Flinders who used to—" began Mrs. Pinwell in a whisper.

"Yes, my dear, I 'm afraid he drank. It was a very distressing story, very distressing indeed. They say he drank himself to death. A very clever salesman too—very clever! They tell me he worked this dis-

trict up splendidly, and then gradually let it go to pieces.”

“Dear, dear! I can’t think how people do such things?” murmured Mrs. Pinwell.

“It was a great recommendation in my case,” continued her husband, “that I was a teetotaler. Mr. Hylam made a great point of that. He asked me several times, and read the letter of Judkins & Co. vouching for my honesty and sobriety for a period of twenty-two years. He seemed very pleased about that.”

At the end of the first month the orders that Mr. Pinwell had secured for Dollbones were of a negligible character. He felt discouraged—as though conscious of there being something fundamentally wrong in his method of doing business—but his wife cheered him by expressing her view that it would probably take *months* before his initial spade-work would take effect.

He started on his rounds a little earlier after that, and stayed a little later. He became more persistent and more patient. He went back again and again to see people who seemed inaccessible. He tried to be a little more assertive and plausible in his solicitations, but at the end of the second month there was little improvement in his returns, and his commissions amounted to scarcely enough to pay for the new oil-cloth in the sitting-room.

The optimism of Mrs. Pinwell was in no way affected by this failure, but a more alarming note was struck by Mr. Rodney of the "Outer London Department." He told Mr. Pinwell that Mr. Hylam was *not at all satisfied* with his work so far, and he would have to show greater energy and enterprise during the ensuing month, or the firm would be impelled to try a new traveler for that district, one who could show better results.

Mr. Pinwell was very alarmed. The idea of being “out” again kept him awake at night. It was a very serious thing. He put in longer hours still, and hurried more rapidly between his calls. He increased his stock of samples till they amounted to a very considerable weight. He made desperate appeals for orders, ringing the changes on various ways of expressing himself. But at the end of the next week there was still no improvement on the pages of his order-book. There was one firm in particular who caused him considerable heart-burning—Messrs. Carron and Musswell. These were quite the biggest people in the neighborhood, and had five different branches, each doing a prosperous business. Mr. Pinwell for the life of him could not find out how to get into the good graces of this firm. No one seemed to know who bought for them, and he was referred from one person to another, and sent dashing

from one branch to another, all to no purpose.

He had one friend who had a small retail business of his own, a Baptist named Senner, who gave him small orders occasionally. He went into Mr. Senner's shop one Friday, and feeling thoroughly tired and discouraged, he poured out his tale of woe to Mr. Senner. Mr. Senner was a large doleful man, to whom the sorrows of others were as balm. He listened to Mr. Pinwell's misfortunes in sympathetic silence, breathing heavily. At the end of the peroration his son entered the shop. He was a white-faced, dissipated-looking young man who wore lavender ties and brushed his hair back. One might have imagined that he would have been a source of disappointment to Mr. Senner, but quite the contrary was the case. The son had a genius for concealing his vices from his father, and his father had a great opinion of the

boy's intelligence and character. He certainly had a faculty of securing orders for his father's business.

On this occasion Mr. Senner turned to his son and said:

“Harry, who buys for Carron & Musswell?”

The son looked at Mr. Pinwell and fidgeted with his nails. Then he grinned weakly and said:

“Oh, you want to get hold of Clappe.”

Mr. Pinwell came forward and said:

“Oh, indeed! I'm really very much obliged to you. It's very kind! Mr. Clappe, you say? Dear me! yes. Thank you very much. I'll go and ask for Mr. Clappe.” And he shook the young man's hand.

The young man continued grinning in rather a superior manner, and at that moment Mr. Senner's attention was attracted by a customer who entered the shop. Mr.

Pinwell picked up his bags and went out. He had not gone more than a dozen yards when he became aware of Senner junior at his side. The young man still grinned, and he said:

"I say, you know, it's no good your going to Carron & Musswell's and asking for Clappe. You'll never get hold of him in that way."

"Really!" exclaimed Mr. Pinwell. "Now tell me, what would you suggest?"

The young man sniffed and looked up and down the street, and a curiously leery expression came over his face. Then he said:

"I expect I could fix it for you all right, Pinwell. You'd better come with me into the bar of the 'Three Amazons' after lunch. I'll introduce you. Of course, you know, Mr. Pinwell,—er—you know, business is business. We always like to oblige our friends, and so on—"

He looked at Mr. Pinwell furtively and bit his nails. For the moment Mr. Pinwell could not catch the drift of these smiles and suggestions, but he had been in the upholstery line for twenty-seven years, and it suddenly dawned upon him that of course the young man was suggesting that if he introduced him, and business came out of it, he would expect a commission or a bonus. He was quite reasonable. He had a sort of ingrained repugnance to these things himself, but he knew that it was done in business. It was quite a usual thing. Some of the best firms— He took the young man's hand and said:

“Er—of course—Mr. Senner, I shall be very pleased to accommodate you. It's—er—only natural, only natural of course. Business is business. Where shall I meet you?”

The appointment was made for the corner of Mulberry Road at half-past two; and

at that hour Mr. Pinwell arrived with two heavily laden bags. He walked by the side of the young man down the street, and then crossed over into the High Road. Right opposite them was a large gaudy public house called "The Three Amazons," and they crossed over to it. A feeling of diffidence and shyness came over Mr. Pinwell. He had only entered a public house on about three occasions in his life, and then under some very stringent business demands, or else to get a bottle of brandy when his wife was very ill. Nevertheless he followed the young man through a passage and entered the saloon bar, in the corner of which he deposited his bags. The bar was fairly crowded with business men, but there was one figure that by its personality immediately arrested Mr. Pinwell's attention. He was a very big man in a new shiny top-hat with a curl to it. He was leaning heavily against the center of the bar, and was sur-

rounded by three or four other men who seemed to be hanging on his words. He had a large red face and small, dark, expressionless eyes. The skin seemed to be tight and moist, and to bind up his features in inelastic bags, except round the eyes, where it puckered up into dark yellowish layers of flesh. His hands were fat and stiff and blue like the hands of a gouty subject. His gray hair curled slightly under the brim of his hat, and his clothes were ponderously impressive from the silk reverses of his tail coat to the dark-brown spats that covered his square-toed boots. As they entered, this impressive individual looked in their direction and gave young Mr. Senner a faint nod, and then continued his conversation.

“That ’s Clappe,” whispered Mr. Pinwell’s cicerone, and dusted the knees of his trousers. He then added:

“We ’d better wait a bit.”

They stood there in the corner of the bar, and the young man produced a silver cigarette-case and offered its contents to Mr. Pinwell, an overt act of kindness which that gentleman appreciated but did not take advantage of. They waited there twenty minutes before an opportunity presented itself of making any approach to the great man. But in the meantime Mr. Pinwell watched the conversation with considerable interest. The four men stood very close together, smoking, and speaking in thick whispers. He was alarmed at moments by the way in which one would hold a glass of whisky-and-water at a perilous angle over the waistcoat of another, while fumbling with a cigarette in the unoccupied hand. He could not hear the conversation, but occasional sentences reached him: "It 's the cheapest line there is." "Here! I tell you where you can get—" "D'you know what they paid last year?" "I 'ad

’im by the short ’airs that time.” “ ’E says to me—”

It occurred to Mr. Pinwell that there was something distressing about this scene, something repelling and distasteful, but he consoled himself with the reflection that after all business had to be conducted somehow. Money had to be made to pay for the streets and the lamp-posts, and the public baths and the battleships. “Business is not always pleasant,” he reflected, “but it has to be done.”

At the end of twenty minutes two of the men went away and left Mr. Clappe talking apathetically to the remaining man.

“Now ’s our chance,” said Senner junior, and he walked across the bar. He seized on a lull in the conversation to step forward and touch Mr. Clappe on the arm.

“Er—excuse me, Mr. Clappe,” he said. “This is my friend Mr. Pinwell, of Doll-bones.”

The big man glanced from Senner junior to Mr. Pinwell and gave that gentleman an almost imperceptible nod. He then sighed, breathed heavily, and took a long drink from the glass in front of him.

"I'm very pleased to meet you, Mr. Clappe," said Pinwell nervously. "I've heard about you. I'm with Dollbones, you know, *the* Dollbones. We have—er—several very good lines just now."

The great Clappe fixed him with his lugubrious eyes and suddenly said in a thick voice:

"What 'll you drink?"

It is curious that Mr. Pinwell with all his experience should have been taken back by this hospitable request. He stammered and said:

"Oh! thank you very much, sir. I don't think I 'll—at least, I 'll have—er—a lime-juice and soda."

And then Mr. Clappe behaved in a very

extraordinary way. An expression of utter dejection came over his face. He puffed his cheeks out and suddenly muttered, “Oh, my God!”

And then he rolled round and *deliberately turned his back on Mr. Pinwell and his friend!* It was a very trying moment. Mr. Pinwell was at his wit’s end how to act, and Senner junior did not help him in any way. On the contrary he seemed to be taking Mr. Clappe’s side. He gave a sort of snigger of disgust, and called across the bar in a jaunty voice:

“Johnny Walker and soda, please, Miss Parritt.”

Mr. Pinwell gaped ineffectually at the back of the great man, and hesitated whether to make any further advance. But he was relieved of the necessity of coming to a decision by the act of Mr. Clappe himself, who slowly drained the remnants of refreshment in his glass, and then walked

heavily out of the bar, without looking round.

In the meantime young Senner had acquired his drink, and was feverishly tapping the end of a cigarette on the rail. He took a long drink and spluttered slightly, and then, turning on Mr. Pinwell, he said:

"What particular brand of blankety fool are you?"

"I beg your pardon?" exclaimed Mr. Pinwell, amazed.

"I tell you," said the young man, "you 're a particular type of blankety fool. You 've missed the chance of yer life! Don't you know when a man like Clappe asks yer to have a drink yer a blankety fool not to? D'you know that man places thousands and thousands of pounds a year for Carron & Musswell? Thousands, I tell yer! It don't matter to 'im where he places the orders. He puts it all out

among 'is pals. You 'ad a chance of being a pal, and you 've muffed it!”

“But—but—but—” spluttered Mr. Pinwell. “I really—I—had no idea. I said I would have a drink. It was only that I ordered a—er—non-alcoholic drink. I really can’t—”

“Psaugh!”

Young Mr. Senner swirled the whisky round in his glass and drank it at a gulp. Then he muttered:

“Gawd! Asking Clappe for a lime-juice and soda!”

Mr. Pinwell thought about this meditatively. He wondered whether he had been in the wrong. After all, people all had their notions of the way to conduct business. Business was a very big thing. It had “evolved”—that was the word!—evolved out of all sorts of complicated social conditions, supply and demand, and so on. A man perhaps who had been in the

habit of taking alcoholic refreshment and expecting others to—it might perhaps be difficult for him to understand.

"Don't you never drink?" suddenly exclaimed Mr. Senner.

"I—er—occasionally have a glass of stout," murmured Mr. Pinwell. "Last Christmas my wife's sister brought us a bottle of canary sac. I have no particular taste for—er—things of this sort—"

"Anyway," said Mr. Senner, "you 're not under any bally pledge?"

"Oh, dear me, no!" exclaimed Mr. Pinwell.

"Well, then," answered his youthful adviser. "I should advise you next time Clappe or any one like him asks you to have a drink, lap it up like a poodle and stand him a quick one in return."

Mr. Pinwell surveyed his friend over the rim of his glasses, and thought for some minutes. Then he said:

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“I ’m afraid Mr. Clappe is not likely to ask me to have a drink again.”

But the young man of precocious experience answered:

“If you come in here to-morrer, I ’ll bet yer he ’ll have forgotten who you are.”

It was all a very astounding experience, and that night in bed Mr. Pinwell gave the matter long and serious consideration. If his circumstances had been normal he would have hardly thought about it for five consecutive minutes, but his circumstances were anything but normal. They were somewhat desperate. He was on his last month’s trial. If he should be out again! . . . Both the children wanted new clothes, and Eileen’s boots were all to pieces. And then there was that bill of Batson’s for three pounds seventeen shillings, for which payment was demanded by the seventeenth; there were other bills less urgent perhaps but—the little man kept

turning restlessly in bed and even in his sleep he made febrile calculations.

It must be acknowledged that the result of Mr. Pinwell's nocturnal meditations tended to loosen certain moral tendencies in himself. He set out on the morrow in a peculiarly equivocal frame of mind, wavering between conflicting impulses, but already predisposed to temporize with his conscience if by so doing he could advance what he considered to be the larger issues of business considerations. These first concessions, curiously enough, were not made at the instance of the great Mr. Clappe, however, but at that of a certain Mr. Cherish whom he met during that day. He was a breezy, amiable person, and the manager of the International Hardwood Company. He was just going out to lunch as Mr. Pinwell called, and being in a particularly buoyant mood, owing to a successful business deal, he took hold of our

hero's arm and drew him into the street. As they walked along he asked what it was that Pinwell wanted, and that gentleman immediately expatiated on the virtues of the goods he had at his disposal. While talking he found himself almost unconsciously led into the bar of a public-house called "The Queen of Roumania." And when asked by Mr. Cherish, "What he was going to have," a sudden desperate instinct of adventure came over him, and he called for whisky. When it was brought he drank it in little sips, and thought it the most detestable drink he had ever tasted. But he determined to see the matter through, and salved his conscience with the reflection that it was just "in the way of business." He certainly had to acknowledge that after drinking it he felt a certain elevated sense of assurance. He talked to Mr. Cherish quite unselfconsciously and listened to him with concen-

trated attention. This mental attitude was quickened by the discovery that Mr. Cherish was actually in need of certain embroideries that Dollbones were in a position to supply. It would be quite a big order. He promised to bring samples of the embroideries on the following day, and took his departure. During the afternoon he felt a sudden reaction from the whisky and was very tired. He went home early, complaining to his wife of "a bad headache, as though something had disagreed with him." Nevertheless the prospect of securing the order for the embroideries excited him considerably, and he went so far as to tell her that he hoped things were soon going to take a turn for the better. He arrived at his appointment the next day to the minute, carrying a very heavy valise stuffed with machine embroideries. He was kept waiting by Mr. Cherish for nearly an hour, and was then ushered into his presence. Mr.

Cherish was still in a very jovial mood and had another gentleman with him. He shook Mr. Pinwell's hand and immediately told him three obscene stories that he had just heard—Mr. Cherish was reputed to have the largest repertoire of obscene stories in the trade—and the other gentleman also told two. Pinwell laughed at them to the best of his ability, although they did not appear to him to be particularly humorous. He then felt peculiarly uncomfortable in that for the life of him he could not think of a story in reply. He never could remember these stories. So he opened his valise and displayed the tapestries. The other two gentlemen took a desultory interest in them as tapestries, but a rapacious interest in them as regards value. They were figured tapestries and the price was four pounds seventeen and sixpence a yard. Mr. Cherish mentioned casually that they would want

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about seventy yards. And then Mr. Pinwell made the rapidest mental calculation he had ever made in his life. Seventy yards at £4,17s. 6*d.* would be £341,5s. which, at two per cent. would mean just on seven pounds for himself! It was dazzling! Seven gold sovereigns! However, the order was not yet given. The two gentlemen talked about it at some length, and looked up other quotations. At last Mr. Cherish said:

"Well, I think we 'll go and see what the 'Queen of Roumania' has got up her sleeve."

Mr. Pinwell and the other gentleman laughed, and they all went out. Mr. Pinwell dreaded the prospect of drinking more whisky, but—seven golden sovereigns! enough to pay that bill of Batson's and to buy the children all the clothes they wanted! He knew in any case the etiquette of the trade, and when they arrived in the

resplendent bar it was he who insisted on ordering “three Scotch whiskies and a split soda.” On the arrival of these regenerating beverages the other two gentlemen resumed their sequence of improper stories. And it was just after the glasses had been re-charged at the instance of Mr. Cherish that he suddenly recollected a story he had heard nearly twenty years ago. It was a disgusting story, and it had impressed itself on his memory for the reason that it struck him when he heard it as being so incredibly vulgar that he could not understand how any one could appreciate it. But as he neared the end of his second glass of whisky it suddenly flashed into his mind that here was the story that Mr. Cherish and his friend would like. He had by this time arrived at an enviable state of unselfconsciousness, and he told the story as well as he had ever told anything in his life. The result amazed him.

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The other two gentlemen roared with laughter, and Mr. Cherish tilted his hat back and slapped his leg.

"Gawd's truth! that 's a damn good story, Pinwell!" he cried out several times.

Other people came into the bar, and Mr. Pinwell found himself something of a hero. Every one seemed to know Mr. Cherish, and he introduced him, and on several occasions said, "I say, Pinwell, tell Mr. Watson that story about the sea captain."

The story was an unqualified success, and seemed in some way to endear him to Mr. Cherish. That gentleman became more confidential and confiding, and they talked about business.

Mr. Pinwell believed he drank four whis-kies-and-sodas that afternoon. In any case, he arrived home feeling very bilious and ill. He told his wife he had felt faint, and had taken some brandy—"Thank heaven," he thought, "she does n't know

the difference in smell between brandy and whisky!” He said he would go to bed at once, he thought, and he kissed her in rather a maudlin fashion, and said he knew she would be glad to hear that he had that afternoon taken an order for £341—that would mean nearly seven pounds to them! Enough to buy clothes for the children and pay Batson’s bill; he laughed a little hysterically after that, and rolled into bed.

On the following day he was very unwell and unable to get up, and Mrs. Pinwell wrote to the firm and explained that her husband had got his feet wet on his rounds and had contracted a chill. She also inclosed his order-book.

It was three days before he was well enough to resume his rounds, and then he avoided the company of Mr. Cherish and set out on a pilgrimage to the meaner parts of the district. But the orders there

seemed few and far between, and a feeling of depression came over him.

On the 21st of the month he was bidden to the presence of Mr. Rodney. That gentleman said that the firm was still dissatisfied with his efforts, but on the strength of the order he had secured from the International Hardwood Co. they were willing to keep him on for another month's trial. But unless at the end of that time he had secured further orders of a similar nature, he must consider his engagement at an end.

It would be tedious and extremely disconcerting to follow the precise movements of Thomas Pinwell during the ensuing four weeks. It need only be said that, utterly discouraged by his lonely peregrinations in the paths of honest effort, he eventually once more sought the society of young Mr. Senner and Mr. Cherish. In their company he discovered what might be called "a cheering fluidity." He found that

whisky made him so ill that he simply could not drink it, but he drank ale, stout, brandy, and gin. None of these things agreed with him, but he found that by drinking as little as possible and ringing the changes on them he could just manage to keep going. The direct result of this moral defection was that his circle of business acquaintances increased at an enormous rate. He gradually got to know the right place and the right hour to catch the right people. His efforts on behalf of Messrs. Dollbones during the following three months were eminently satisfactory, and his own commissions amounted to no mean sum. Neither was his conscience seriously affected by this change of habit. He considered it an inevitable development of his own active progress “in the way of business.” The very word “business” had a peculiarly mesmerizing effect upon him. It was a fetish. He looked

derstand business. It is for her benefit that I take it."

Sunday was a great joy to him. He would take the children out for a walk in the morning while his wife cooked the dinner. In the afternoon he would have a nap; but the greatest luxury of the day seemed to him that he need drink nothing except water.

At the end of six months there came a proud day when Mr. Rodney informed him that Mr. Hylam was quite satisfied with his progress, and his ordinary salary was raised to two pounds. It was summer-time, and the accumulation of his commissions justified the family moving into larger rooms, one of which was to be a bathroom. But Mr. Pinwell was beginning to feel his health very much affected, and he looked forward with intense avidity to the two weeks' holiday which was his due in September. In July he achieved a great

triumph. He met and got into the good graces of the great Mr. Clappe. As Senner junior predicted, that gentleman had quite forgotten their previous meeting, and it happened in the company of the good Mr. Cherish. They all met in the bar of “The Cormorant,” and after several drinks Cherish said:

“I say, Pinwell, tell Mr. Clappe that story about the sea captain!”

Mr. Pinwell complied, and when he had finished he saw the shiny bags of flesh on Mr. Clappe’s face shaking. He was evidently very much amused, although his eyes looked hard and tired. He said hoarsely:

“Damn good! What’s yours?”

Mr. Pinwell did not fail on this occasion, and asked for some gin. And directly he noticed that the great man’s glass was nearly empty, he insisted on ordering some more all round. He found Mr. Clappe an

expensive client. He drank prodigiously, in a splendid nonchalant manner, hardly noticing it, or taking any interest in who paid for it. It took Mr. Pinwell several weeks, and cost him the price of several whole bottles of whisky, before he became sufficiently established in favor to solicit orders. But once having arrived there, the rest was easy, for Mr. Clappe had the reputation of being "loyal to his pals," and he had the power of placing very large orders.

There came a day when Mr. Pinwell received an order for over eight hundred pounds' worth of goods, and for the first time in his life he got very drunk. He arrived home in a cab very late at night and was just conscious enough to tell his wife that he had been taken ill, and some one had given him some brandy, and it had gone to his head. She helped him to bed, and seemed rather surprised and alarmed.

On the following day he was very ill, and a doctor was sent for. He examined him carefully, and looked stern. Out in the hall he said to Mrs. Pinwell:

“Excuse me, Mrs. Pinwell, but does your husband drink rather a lot?”

“Drink!” exclaimed the lady. “My Tom! . . . Why, he ’s practically a teetotaler.”

The doctor looked at her thoughtfully and murmured, “Oh!” Then, as he turned to go, he said:

“Well, we ’ll pull him through this, I hope, but he must be very careful. You must advise him never to touch alcohol in any form. It ’s poison to him,” and he left Mrs. Pinwell speechless with indignation.

Mr. Pinwell’s illness proved more obstinate than was anticipated, and it was some weeks before he was well enough to get about. When he arrived at that stage the firm of Dollbones were considerate enough

to suggest that he might take his holiday earlier than had been arranged, and go away at once.

Consequently, on a certain fine morning in August, Mr. and Mrs. Pinwell, with the two children, set out for a fortnight's holiday to Herne Bay. The firm paid his salary while he was away, and in addition he had now nearly thirty-five pounds in the bank, and all his debts were paid. It was many years since the family had been in such an affluent position, and everything pointed to the prospect of a joyous and beneficial time. And so indeed, to a large extent, it was. Mr. Pinwell felt very shaky when he arrived, and he spent most of his time sitting in a deck chair on the sands, watching the children, while his wife sat on the sands by his side, sewing. The fresh breezes from the Channel made him very sleepy at first, but he gradually got used

to them. It was extremely pleasant sitting there listening to the waves breaking on the shore and watching the white sails of yachts gliding hither and thither; very pleasant and very refreshing. It was only after some days that when he was left alone a certain moroseness came over him. He could not explain this to himself; it seemed so unreasonable. But he felt a curious and restless desire and an irritability. These moods became more pronounced as the week advanced, in spite of the fact that his strength returned to him. He had moods when he wished to be alone and the children tired him.

On the fifth day, he and his wife were strolling up from the beach late in the afternoon, and they were nearing their lodgings when he suddenly said:

“I think I ’ll just stroll round and get a paper.”

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"Oh! Shall I come with you?" his wife asked.

"No, no, my dear. Don't. Er—I'll just stroll round by myself—"

He seemed so anxious to go by himself that she did not insist, and he sauntered round the corner. He looked back to see that she had gone in, and then he walked rather more quickly round into the High Street. He hummed to himself and glanced rather furtively at the contents of the newspaper bills, then, after looking up and down the street; he suddenly darted into the saloon bar of the principal hotel. . . .

After his second glass of gin-and-water a feeling of comfortable security crept over him. After all, it was a very ingratiating atmosphere this, ingratiating and sociable. He glanced round the bar and carried on a brief but formal conversation with a florid individual standing near him. He hesi-

tated for a moment whether he would tell him the story about the sea captain, but on second thoughts decided to reserve it to a more intimate occasion. Besides, he must not be away long.

After that it became a habit with Mr. Pinwell for the rest of the holiday for him at some time during the day, and occasionally twice or three times during the day, to “go for a stroll round by himself.” His wife never for one moment suspected the purpose of these wanderings, though she was informed that he was taking another bottle of the medicine.

When they returned to town Mr. Pinwell certainly seemed better and more eager about his work. It may be that he had the measure of his constitution more under control. He knew what was the least damaging drink he could take, and he knew how much he dare consume without immediately disastrous results. He gradually became

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a well-known habitu   of all the best-known saloon bars in the neighborhood of his rounds. His character altered. He always remained mild and unassertive, but his face became pinched and thin, and he began to enjoy the reputation of being a "knowing one." He did not make a fortune in his solicitations for orders for gimp, trimmings, buttons, and embroidery, but he certainly earned a very fair competence. In two years' time he was entirely intimate with every buyer of importance in the Camling Town district and out as far as the "Teck Arms" at Highgate. The family still occupied the larger rooms (with the bathroom) that they had moved to, and both the girls attended the Camling Town Collegiate School for Girls, and showed every promise of being worthy and attractive members of society.

It was not till the end of the second year that two events following rapidly on each



other's heels tended to disturb the normal conditions of the Pinwell family. A letter arrived one day from a lawyer. It appeared that a brother of Mr. Pinwell's whom he had not seen for twelve years, and who had owned a farm in Northamptonshire, had died intestate. He was not married, and Tom Pinwell was his only living relative. Under the circumstances he inherited the whole of his brother's property. When this had been assessed it was proved to be worth £140 per year. Needless to say this news brought great joy to the traveler's family. Visions of great splendor opened out before them, wealth, comfort, security. The day after the settlement was made, Tom Pinwell entertained Mr. Cherish, Mr. Clappe, and a few others of his friends to a supper at "The Queen of Roumania," and the next day he was taken very ill. He lay in a critical state for ten days, nursed with a sort of feline intensity

by his wife. The doctor then said that he might recover—he was a different doctor to the one who had so exasperated Mrs. Pinwell with his outrageous suggestions—but that he would be an invalid all his life. He would have to live on special food and must not touch either sweets or alcohol in any form.

On a certain evening Mr. Pinwell showed traces of convalescence and was allowed to sit up in bed. His wife as usual sat by his bedside, knitting. He seemed more cheerful than he had ever been before, and Mrs. Pinwell took the opportunity of saying:

“What a blessing it is, dear, about this money!”

“Yes, dear,” answered her spouse.

“Do you know, Tom,” she said suddenly, “there is a thing I ’ve wanted to do all my life. And now perhaps is the opportunity.”

“What is that, my dear?”

“To go and live in the country.”

“Yes, dear.”

“Think of it! When you ’re better, we can go and get a little cottage somewhere, with a bit of a garden, you know—grow our own vegetables and that. You can live fine in some parts of the country for £140 a year. You ’ll be able to give up this nasty tiring old business. It ’ll be lovely.”

“Yes, my dear.”

Mr. Pinwell’s voice sounded rather faint, and she busied herself with his beef-tea. Nothing more was said about the idea that night. But gradually, as he got stronger, Mrs. Pinwell enlarged on the idea. She talked about the flowers they could grow, and the economy of having your own fowls and potatoes. It would have to be right in the country, but not *too* far from a village or town, so that the girls could continue their schooling and meet other girls. To all of this Mr. Pinwell agreed faintly,

and he even made a suggestion that he thought Surrey was nicer than Buckinghamshire.

Mr. Pinwell was confined to his bedroom for nearly two months. And then one day a letter came from Messrs. Dollbones. It was to say that in view of the short time that Mr. Pinwell had been in their service they could not see their way to continue paying his salary after the end of the month, unless he were well enough to continue his work.

Mrs. Pinwell said:

"No, and they need n't continue to pay it at all, for all we care!"

A troubled look came over her husband's face, and he said:

"Um—they've treated me very well, Emma, very well indeed. There's many firms don't pay their employees at all when they're ill."

"Well, then, they jolly well ought to,"

answered Mrs. Pinwell. “People get ill through doing the firm’s work.”

Mr. Pinwell sniffed. It was the one subject upon which he and his wife were inclined to differ. Mrs. Pinwell did not understand business; she had no reverence for it.

By the end of the month Mr. Pinwell was up again and going for short walks up and down the street. One day he said:

“Let me see, my dear—next Thursday is the first of the new month, is n’t it?”

“Yes,” answered Mrs. Pinwell. “And thank goodness you have n’t got to go back to that horrid old business!”

Mr. Pinwell said nothing at the time, but a few hours later he said:

“Er—I ’ve been thinking, my dear. I rather think I ought perhaps to—er—to try and see if I could go for a little while on Thursday. You see, the firm have treated me very generously, very gener-

ously indeed—and—er—business is business."

"What does it matter?" answered his wife. "I 'm sure they 've got some one else doing your job by now. Besides, you 're not strong enough."

Mr. Pinwell fidgeted with his watch-chain and walked up the street. During the next two days Mrs. Pinwell could tell that he was fretting. He seemed distracted and inclined to be irritable. He gave demonstrations of his walking powers and stayed out longer and moved more quickly. He got into such a state on the Wednesday evening, that in a weak moment Mrs. Pinwell made the mistake of her life.

She agreed that he might try and go the next day just for an hour or so, but he was to come home directly he felt tired.

Tom started out on the Thursday morning, and he seemed in a great state of elation. In spite of his weakness he insisted

on taking one of his bags of samples. He walked more quickly down the street than she had seen him walk for a long time. Mrs. Pinwell then turned to her household duties. She was disappointed, but not entirely surprised, that her husband did not come home to lunch, but at half-past three a sudden curious feeling of alarm came over her. She tried to reason with herself that it was all nonsense; nothing had happened, Tom was a little late—that was all. But her reason quailed before some more insidious sense of calamity. The children came home from school at a quarter-past four, and still he had not returned. She gave them their tea and somehow their gay chatter irritated her for the first time. She would not convey to them her sense of fear. She washed up the tea-things and busied herself in the house.

It was a quarter to six when Tom came home. He staggered into the hall. His

eyes had a strange look she had not seen before. He was trembling violently. She did not ask any questions. She took his arm and led him into the bedroom and untied his collar and tie. He lay on the bed and his teeth chattered. She got him a hot-water bottle and gradually undressed him. Then she sent one of the girls for the doctor.

In the meantime he started talking incoherently, although he repeated on one or two occasions, "I 've taken another bottle of the medicine, Emm'."

The doctor was on duty in the surgery when the child called, and he did not come round till half-past eight.

When he looked at Pinwell and took his pulse, he said:

"What 's he been doing?"

"He 's been out," said Mrs. Pinwell. "He said he 'd taken another bottle of the medicine."



“Medicine? what medicine?” The doctor seemed to examine the lips of the sick man very closely, then he shook his head. He turned to Mrs. Pinwell as though he were going to make a statement, then he changed his mind. It did not require any great astuteness to determine from the doctor’s face that the case was critical. He gave the patient a powder, and after a few instructions to Mrs. Pinwell he went, and said he would return later in the evening. After the doctor had gone, Mr. Pinwell was delirious for an hour, and then he sank into a deep sleep. The doctor returned just after eleven. He examined him and said that nothing more could be done that night. He would return in the morning. In the meantime, if things took a more definite turn, they could send for him.

Tom Pinwell lay unconscious for nearly twenty-four hours, sometimes mumbling

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feverishly, at other times falling into a deep coma. But suddenly, late on the following evening, he seemed to alter. His face cleared, and he sighed peacefully. Mrs. Pinwell noticed the change and she went up close to the bed. He looked at her and said suddenly:

"I don't think it would do, my dear, to go and live in the country."

"No, no, dear; all right. We'll live where you like."

"You see," he said after a pause, "business has to be gone through. . . . There was Judkins & Co., they treated me very fair, then they went bankrupt. It was very unfortunate, very unfortunate indeed. . . . I would n't like these people—what's their name, Emma? . . ."

"Dollbones."

"Ah, yes, Dollbones! . . . Dollbones. No, I would n't like them to think I'd let them in like. Just because I had a little

money. . . . It 's a very serious thing—business”

Mr. Pinwell seemed about to say something, but he smiled instead and looked up at the ceiling. He became very still after that, and Mrs. Pinwell placed a book so that the candle-light should not shine on his face. All through the night she sat there watching and doing the little things the doctor had told her to. But he was very still. Once he sighed, and on another occasion she thought he said:

“That was very amusin’ about that invoice of Barrel and Beelswright, Mr. Cherish . . . oh, dear me!”

About dawn, thoroughly exhausted with her vigil, Mrs. Pinwell fell into a fitful sleep, sitting up in her chair. She only slept for a few minutes, and then awakened with a start. The short end of candle was spluttering in its socket, and its light was contending with the cold blue glimmer

of the early day. She shivered, her frame racked by physical fatigue, and her mind benumbed by the incredible stillness of the little room.

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"Consequently, ladies and gentlemen, after placing £17,500 in the reserve fund, for the reasons which I have indicated to you, I feel justified in recommending a dividend of $12\frac{1}{2}$ per cent. on the ordinary shares."

The big man with the square chin dabbed his forehead with his handkerchief and took a sip of water as he resumed his seat. A faint murmur of approval and applause ran round the room; papers rustled, and people spoke in low, breathless voices. Twelve and a half per cent.! It was a good dividend, a very good dividend! A hundred different brains visualized rapidly what it meant to them personally. To some it meant a few extra luxuries, to oth-

ers comforts, and to some a distinct social advance. If Dollbones could only keep this up!

Sir Arthur Schelling was seconding the adoption of this report, but it was a mere formality. No one took any interest in the white-haired financier, except to nudge each other and say, “That ’s Schelling. They say he ’s worth half a million.” It was a curiously placid meeting, there was no criticism, and every one seemed on the best of terms. It broke up, and the shareholders dispersed into little knots, or scattered to spread the good news that Dollbones were paying twelve and a half per cent.

Sir Arthur took the chairman’s hand and murmured:

“I must congratulate you, Hylam. An excellent report!”

The large man almost blushed with pleasure, and said:

"It 's very kind of you, Sir Arthur. Are you lunching in town?"

"I was going to suggest that you lunch with me at the Carlton. I have my car here."

"Oh! thank you very much. I shall be delighted."

Mr. Hylam turned and gave a few instructions to his lawyer and his private secretary, and handed various papers to each; then he followed his host out of the Cannon Street Hotel.

They got into the great car, and each man lighted a well-merited cigar. As they drove through the city, Sir Arthur discussed a few details of the balance-sheet, and then added:

"I really think you have shown a remarkable genius of organization in conducting this business, Hylam. It is a business which I should imagine requires con-

siderable technical knowledge and great—er—tact.”

Mr. Hylam laughed deprecatingly and muttered:

“Oh, we have our little difficulties!” He puffed at his cigar and looked out of the window.

“So many—er—varieties of employees, I should imagine!” said Sir Arthur.

“Yes, you’re right, sir. There are varieties. I’ve had a lot of difficulty with the travelers this year.” He gave a vicious puff at his cigar and stamped on the ash on the floor, and suddenly exclaimed:

“Drunken swine!”

Sir Arthur readjusted his gold-rimmed pince-nez and looked at his friend.

“Is that so indeed?”

“Yes,” answered Mr. Hylam. “I don’t know how it is. They nearly all drink. In one district alone, I’ve had two travelers

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practically drink themselves to death, one after the other."

"I 'm very distressed to hear that," said Sir Arthur; "very distressed. It 's a very great social evil. My wife, as you may know, is on a board of directorship of the Blue Riband Evangelists. They do a lot of good work. They have a branch in Camling Town. They have pleasant evenings, you know—cocoa and bagatelle, and so on; and lectures on Sunday. But, I don't know, it does n't seem to eradicate the evil."

"No; I 'm afraid it 's in the blood with many of them," said the managing director.

"Yes, that 's very true. I often tell my wife I 'm afraid she wastes her time. It seems inexplicable. I can't see why they should do it. What satisfaction can it be to—er—drink to excess? And then it must hamper them so in the prosecution of their

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work. It seems in a way so—ungrateful, to the people who employ them, I mean. Ah! here we are at the Carlton! Champneys, come back for me at—er—three-thirty. Yes, it 's a great social evil, a very great social evil indeed!”

THE END